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## **BRAND AND QUALITY LABELS: WHICH INTERACTION?**

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### **Abstract**

Numerous works have illustrated the benefits of including quality labels on food products. They provide products, brands and territories with added value. The increase in quality signs nevertheless leads to market congestion resulting from both the juxtaposition of these signs and the overlap created on the same product. It is not uncommon to see a product carrying a commercial brand, a quality sign and a geographical origin. Combining a brand and a quality sign is a relatively common practice, but we are beginning to notice a significant increase in the number of products carrying two or even three quality signs (brand and origin, organic and fair trade, organic and origin, fair trade and origin). Recent work has shown that, in some cases, this practice of combining signs is not synonymous with an improved product valuation.

In this paper, based on the contributions of cognitive psychology and experimental economics, we endeavour to demonstrate the role of cognitive coherence between the different labels in consumer choices. This research is based on two food products carrying: i) an organic label and a fair trade label, and ii) a brand and a geographical origin. Results show that the additional impact of the second label is very limited and less beneficial than the sum of added values of each label, and that it may lead to a negative value in the case of perceived incongruity between the two elements.

Key words: food, quality labels, categorisation, cognitive psychology, interaction effect

## **BRAND AND QUALITY LABELS: WHICH INTERACTION?**

### **Introduction**

Numerous works have illustrated the benefits of including quality signs on products. They provide products, brands and territories with added value. Certain quality signs are used as policy instruments for the development and occupation of rural areas (AOC/AOP, PGI), while others are primarily intended to inform the consumer and reduce information asymmetries (AB, Label Rouge). Some quality signs (or, more generally speaking, labels) are genuine market instruments which provide an efficient response to the increasingly urgent consumer need for information.

When purchasing food products, consumers look for information when they are choosing the products in the shop (Bettman and Park, 1980), searching for heuristics which minimise their cognitive efforts. Labels are thus very useful information summaries for the consumer, in particular in evaluating credence attributes. Agricultural and agri-food firms and distributors have therefore increased the number of labels in order to differentiate their products from those of their competitors, thereby contributing to making the market for products carrying quality signs extremely complex and difficult for the consumer to understand.

The increase of quality signs leads to market congestion resulting from both the juxtaposition of these signs and the overlap created on the same product. It is not uncommon to see a product carrying a commercial brand, a quality sign and a geographical origin. Combining a brand and a quality sign is a relatively common practice but we are beginning to notice a significant increase in the number of products carrying two or even three quality signs (brand and label, organic and fair trade, organic and origin, fair trade and origin, etc.). The works of Hassan and Monier-Dilhan (2005) demonstrate that, in certain cases, this practice of combining signs is not synonymous with an improved product valuation due to the perceived interactions between the labels present. In the field of marketing, the interaction phenomena between different product attributes have been the subject of numerous works based on the theories of cognitive psychology. The theory of information integration considers that in the quality assessment process, the consumer evaluates a product by allocating a different weight to different attributes (country of origin and brand) (Jo et al, 2003). These different assessments are then combined, either in a weighting model or in an additive model, to form an overall evaluation of the product.

Another theory, put forward by Häubl and Elrod (1999) explains the success or failure of combinations of labels using congruence theory or cognitive coherence. Research in the field of cognitive psychology suggests that, in the consumer's mind, each label matches a category pattern with different representations and associations. We might therefore examine the coherence of the mental pattern relating to the different quality signs on a particular product. Similarly the question is also raised of the prominence of one label compared to the others.

In this paper, based on the contributions of cognitive psychology and experimental economics, we endeavour to analyse the effects of interaction between labels and to demonstrate the role of cognitive coherence between the different labels in consumer choices. This research is based on two field studies in the agri-food sector, the first concerning products carrying a brand and geographical origin and the second concerning products carrying the "fair trade" and "organic agriculture" labels.

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We will begin by presenting the theoretical bases and research hypotheses before explaining the methodology of the study and finally discussing the results with regard to the theoretical contributions and managerial implications.

## 1. Theoretical developments

### 1.1. The theory of cognitive coherence

In the approach by hierarchical cognitive categories, the categorisation process (allocation of an element to a category) involves comparing the new item to be classified and the characteristics of the different pre-existing memorised categories. This means identifying similarities between a pre-existing memorised category and the new item to be evaluated. Each category is thus defined by a set of attributes which are individually necessary, collectively sufficient and common to all the other members of the category (Medin and Smith, 1984; Komatsu, 1992).

The proximity between the category and the item to be evaluated is reflected by the search for similarity and coherence. Similarity may be perceptual, based on the physical attributes and distinctive characteristics of the category (Tversky, 1977; Johnson, 1984; Ratneshwar *et al.*, 2001); contextual, linked to the formation over time of a category according to a goal (nutritional, travel, etc.); or based on the situation of use (Barsalou, 1991; Johnson, 1984). Conceptual coherence (Murphy and Medin, 1985) involves finding a meaning between the new item and the mental representation of the category in the individual's mind.

### 1.2. Category label and evaluation process

The category label indicates the characteristics or attributes strongly associated with a cognitive category. It activates mental patterns facilitating the quick and easy interpretation of the information available on the product, thereby generating an inferred affective response associated with the category and capable of influencing product evaluation. The literature on information processing shows that there are two stages in the process of forming an attitude: the first involves categorising the item or person by automatically and spontaneously activating the pattern associated with the category. The individual will attempt to link the stimulus to a cognitive category (Fiske and Pavelchak, 1986). The second stage involves refining the first by using all the information available on the item to obtain a more refined or more personalised categorisation. This stage is longer than the first and requires more cognitive resources. These resources are influenced by the need and capacity to process the information (if it is available).

A successful categorisation process requires the activation of the category pattern while the global product evaluation will be based on the affect associated with the category. In the event of failure, i.e. that no category is considered to be pertinent, the evaluation will adopt a more analytical process relating to the different attributes of the item, which will result either in the creation of a new category or in the rejection of the item.

The main category labels identified in the marketing literature are the brand (Tauber, 1988; Aaker and Keller, 1990; Boush and Loken, 1991), the price (Monroe, 1990; Broniarczyk and Alba, 1994; Ladwein, 1995) and the origin (Peterson and Jolibert, 1995; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). Other recent works have shown the role of quality signs (or quality labels) in the consumer evaluation process (Larceneux, 2003; Hassan and Monier-

Dilhan, 2005; Aurier and Fort, 2007; Tagbata and Sirieix, 2008). Thus, a product indicating a brand, an origin, a price and a quality sign may be associated with different cognitive categories which will impact the selection process. Superimposing different category patterns associated with a particular product raises the question of the prominence of one or other of these and highlights the congruence effects between the labels.

### 1.3. The case of “organic” and “fair trade” labels

By definition and in line with their very principles, “organic” and “fair trade” labels can be perceived as indicating environmental, social and economic benefits while protecting public health, welfare and the environment throughout the production and commercialisation process. Even if both labels comply with the values of sustainable development<sup>1</sup>, several works examining different criteria, in particular the rationales and values associated with their consumption, demonstrate that they are clearly different from one another.

Numerous studies show that the main reason for purchasing organic products is not always the environment but rather a whole range of heterogeneous considerations including health, taste, food safety, family health and even respect for traditions (Sirieix et al., 2006; Hughner et al., 2007; Aertens et al., 2009).

Codron et al. (2006) show that by studying the rationale of consumers buying products with an environmental dimension (organic products) or social ethic (fair trade products) and the values associated with these rationales, several differences are revealed. The authors note a certain homogeneity of values associated with the social ethics dimension while the values associated with organic or environmental products are more heterogeneous. This diversity of rationales and values associated with the consumption of organic products is also confirmed by Hughner et al. (2007) and Aertens et al. (2009) who, by summarising research work, demonstrate that health (linked to safety), a desire for good taste (hedonism), discovery (stimulation), the protection of nature and the welfare of both people and animals (universalism), support for local production and the local economy (benevolence), the influence of standards (conformity) and the desire to dominate others (power) are the main rationales at work before the consumption of organic products.

Contrary to organic products, the field of social ethics (fair trade) would appear to almost exclusively a matter of universalist values, emphasising the perceived proximity between the producer and the consumer, environmental protection and decent work conditions (Pirrotte 2007)

Other studies have examined the importance of environmental or social attributes indicated by “organic” labels (Canavari et al., 2003; Krystallis and Chryssohoidis, 2005) or “fair trade” labels (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Loureiro and Lotade, 2005), but the question of the combined influence of these two labels in the valuation a good is a recent one which deserves to be explored.

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<sup>1</sup> *Fair trade, supported by consumers, guarantees producers in developing countries that their goods will be bought at a “fair” price, protected from market fluctuations.*

*Organic agriculture, considered to be economical, independent and non-polluting, respects natural balances, animal welfare and the environment.*

In this article, we present a study of the combined effect of both labels carried on a single product on the consumer's evaluation of the products and then propose hypothesis H1.

**H1: the combined effect of the organic and fair trade labels is weaker than the sum of the effects of each individual label.**

#### **1.4. Coherence between product, brand and origin**

The brand and the country of origin are attributes generally used as selection heuristics aimed at simplifying the product evaluation process.

The works exploring this theme have essentially focused on the effects of delocalising production in certain countries in relation to the perceived origin of the brands. The hypothesis underlying the interaction between country and brand is that changing a brand's country of origin affects major brands more than the weaker brands (Cordell, 1992; Tse and Lee, 1993). Another approach considers that the interaction between brand and country of origin can be explained by the congruence between brand and country. This is defined as the equality between the country of origin of the product and the country of origin of the brand (Häubl and Elrod, 1999). The authors measure the level of congruence between brand and country by the strength of association between the brand and its country of origin. Congruence has a positive effect on the evaluation of product quality over and above the effects of the brand and the country of origin. For example, if a consumer has the choice between a Samsung television set (South Korean brand) produced in Korea and a television of the same brand produced in France, the hypothesis of congruence suggests that the TV set produced in Korea will be seen as being of better quality than the set produced in France.

Just as brands are spontaneously associated with a country of origin, certain products are also closely linked to their country of origin. The perceived coherence between the country and the product can be linked to the equality of the image of the product and of the country (for example cars produced in Germany) as well as to the perceived notoriety of the country in manufacturing the product (for example perfumes from France).

The first authors to examine the question of coherence between a product and a country of origin were Roth and Roméo (1992). They measured the correspondence between a product category and a country. To do this, they used the same dimensions to measure the image of the products and that of the country. The underlying hypothesis is that if the image of the country corresponds to product characteristics considered to be important, then there is a correspondence between the product and the country.

Using elements of the image of the country of origin taken from previous works (Nagashima, 1977; Johansson and Nebenzahl, 1986; Han and Terpstra, 1988), the authors adopt 4 dimensions to measure the image of the country and its importance in consumer choices: innovation, know-how, prestige and price.

By crossing the evaluation of the country dimensions with that of the products, the authors identify 4 situations:

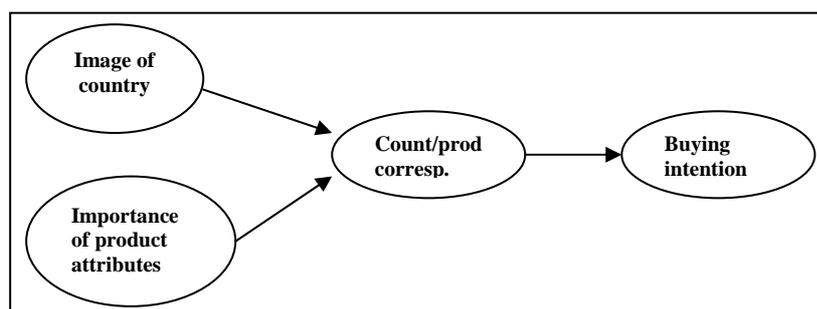
**Table 1: Correspondence between country image and product image (Roth and Roméo, 1992)**

		Dimensions of the country of origin	
		Positive	Negative
Dimensions as product characteristics	Important	Correspondence favourable	Correspondence not favourable
	Not important	Non-correspondence favourable	Non-correspondence not favourable

The 4 situations defined by the authors can be associated with different strategies for promoting products.

The advantage of this study is that we have explicitly endeavoured to measure the effect of perceived correspondence between products and countries on the evaluation of the products.

**Figure 1: Conceptualisation of the effect of correspondence between country and product (Roth and Roméo, 1992)**



These studies show that coherence between quality signs plays an important role in the evaluation of products from the different countries. With regard to correspondence between the region of origin and food product of a specific origin (with PDO<sup>2</sup>, PGI or simple product of origin), we can expect similar effects. The main characteristic of these products indeed lies in the strong link with their geographical origin and the fact that they are typical and unique. Each region is associated with a product (or a range of products). The reputation of each region corresponds to its perceived capacity to produce the product. This capacity may relate to the pedoclimatic conditions or to the know-how and skill of local producers (Van Ittersum et al, 2003).

We therefore formulate the hypothesis that, in the case of perceived inconsistency between the two labels, the valuation of the dual-label product is diminished.

***H2: inconsistency between the place of origin and the product has a negative effect on the product valuation.***

<sup>2</sup> Protected Designation of Origin

## 2. Methodology

Two studies were conducted to verify our hypotheses. The first, involving 120 people, called on experimental economics to measure the effect of dual quality labelling (organic and fair trade) on product valuation. The second was a quasi-experimentation involving 720 people across 3 French regions intended to test the effect of coherence between product and origin on the evaluation of a branded product.

### 2.1. Study 1

We conducted an experiment enabling us to determine the WTP<sup>3</sup> for organic and fair-trade labels. The WTP concept is similar to the idea of an acceptable price. It represents the maximum threshold above which the consumer will not buy the product as he finds it too expensive for the utility he derives from it. Thus, the WTP can be seen as the maximum amount a consumer is willing to pay to purchase a good or service after having assessed both the positive and negative consequences of the purchase. Numerous experimental economics methods can be used to determine the WTP. Within the framework of our research, we opted for the Becker-DeGroot-Marschak mechanism or BDM auction as it is particularly suitable to field experiments and eliminates group effects (Combris and Ruffieux, 2005).

#### 2.1.1. Experimentation protocol

##### *The choice of products*

Following an initial test with consumers and a detailed descriptive analysis in a sensorial analysis laboratory, 4 types of dark chocolate available on the market were used according to their appreciation level (hedonic scores):

- Two organic and fair trade products: BE1, appreciated, and BE2, not appreciated
- Two products without labels: ST1, appreciated and ST2, not appreciated.

##### *Selecting the participants in the experimentations*

The individuals were selected at random in the commune of Montpellier and its surroundings by telephone and using an advertisement left in an organic products outlet. This approach enabled us to obtain a sample of 120 people.

##### *The procedure of the experimentations*

The experimentations involved asking the participants to taste the products selected, gradually providing more information concerning the labels tested. The consumers were never told which brands of chocolate they were tasting.

In order to maintain the anonymity of the products, neutral packaging was produced and adapted to the different phases and informational needs of the consumers.

These experimentations were held in 13 sessions, each divided into 3 phases:

Phase 1: the four bars were tasted without any information being provided. The subjects gave a hedonic score and indicated their WTP for each chocolate.

Phase 2: the subjects indicated their WTP for each type of chocolate based only on the information presented on the labels.

The aim of this phase was to determine the subjects' WTP for “fair trade”, “organic” and “organic fair trade” labels independent of the intrinsic characteristics of the product.

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<sup>3</sup> Willingness To Pay

Phase 3: the 4 bars tasted in phase 1 were tasted again by the subjects who were now given all the information presented on the packaging of each chocolate. The subjects gave a hedonic score and indicated their WTP for each chocolate.

This auction phase allowed us to analyse the change in assessments between the intrinsic characteristics of the chocolates and the information provided on the “organic” and “fair trade” labels.

### 2.1.2. Study 2

We selected two product categories demonstrating large-scale consumption purchased regularly by the majority of consumers and generally associated with a specific French region: cheese, which can be classified as a product subject to little transformation, and cooked dishes, demonstrating a higher level of transformation.

We varied the perceived coherence between the product and the region of origin. A region perceived as a “coherent” origin for the product and a region perceived as “non-coherent” were selected for each product on the basis of a prior survey of 193 people.

In each product / coherent region pairing, we selected<sup>4</sup> a well-known brand within the product category.

**Table 2: The final experimental protocol is as follows:**

	Riches Monts * tomme cheese	William Saurin** cassoulet
Coherent region	Savoy	Toulouse
Non-coherent region	Alsace	Auvergne

\*henceforth referred to as RM cheese

\*\* henceforth referred to as WS dish

4 products were thus provided for evaluation by 360 consumers for each category (tome cheese and cassoulet).

#### *The main measures*

To measure the consumer evaluations, we used a dependent variable frequently used in research works. Attitude is a synthetic measuring instrument of the affect associated with a product, a brand or an origin (Broniarczyk and Alba, 1994; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; Czellar, 2003).

The scale includes 3 items: “I like...”, “I appreciate...” and “I am in favour of...” on a Likert 5-degree scale. We also measured attitude towards the brand and region of origin in order to compare the evaluation of each product attribute.

### 3. Results and discussion

We will present the results of the two studies separately before undertaking a more general discussion of the results.

#### 3.1. The case of “organic” and “fair trade” labels

Table 3 presents the average WTP for each chocolate during phase 1 (total absence of information) and phase 3 (full information). These data enable us to determine the influence

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to three judges who gave their opinion on a list of 20 brands in each product category.

of the “organic” and “fair trade” labels on the perceived quality and the valuation of the chocolates.

**Table 3: Average WTP for the four chocolates and variation between phases 1 and 3**

Chocolates		Phase 1	Phase 3	$\Delta$ Phase - Phase 1	3 t	ddl	sig
Neither organic nor fair trade	ST2	0.91	0.81	-0.10	3.082	101	0.009
	ST1	1.18	1.02	-0.16	2.660	101	0.003
Organic and fair trade	BE2	0.93	1.18	0.25	-4.776	101	0.000
	BE1	1.00	1.33	0.33	5.718	101	0.000

\* The WTP are expressed in euros

The result of the rank equality test conducted on the average WTP during phases 1 and 3 demonstrates that the observed variation of the WTP is significant for all four chocolates. The average WTP for the chocolates which were neither organic nor fair trade (ST1 and ST2) fell significantly between phases 1 and 3 while the opposite effect was observed (significant increase) for the organic and fair trade chocolates (BE1 and BE2).

The information provided in phase 3 caused the WTP for BE2 to increase from 93 centimes to €1.18, i.e. an increase in value of 27%, while the WTP for BE1 increased from €1 to €1.33, representing an increase in value of 33% resulting from the information provided. This result highlights the impact of “organic” and “fair trade” labels in the consumers’ valuation of the chocolates.

Furthermore, the average WTP when the chocolates are only organic or fair trade were respectively €1.25 and €1.31 and not statistically different, thereby showing that consumers are willing to pay just as much for organic products as for fair trade products.

By examining the differentials WTP between the standard chocolate and the chocolates carrying labels (organic, fair trade and organic fair trade) (table 4), we observe that combining the “organic” and “fair trade” labels on the same product gives rise to an additional WTP of €0.91, which is less than the sum of the additional WTP for the organic label (€0.55) and the fair trade label (€0.61), thus confirming the claims of Ruffieux (2004).

Our hypothesis H1 is therefore validated.

**Table 4: Under-additivity of the organic fair trade WTP**

	Organic chocolate (1.25)	Fair trade chocolate (1.31)	Organic fair trade chocolate (1.61)
WTP differential with standard chocolate (0.70)	0.55	0.61	0.91
Organic + fair trade > Organic fair trade	0.55	+ 0.61	> 0.91

This result demonstrates that, in economic terms, the increased value resulting from the combination of the two labels on a single product is lower than the sum of the increased values from the two labels individually. The test results show that at a 5% significance level, the marginal propensity to pay more for both labels together on the same product is less than the sum of the propensities to pay for each of the two elements considered separately. The combined valuation of the two labels on the same bar of chocolate represents an increase in the WTP of €2.04 whereas a separate valuation of these labels considering two individual bars of chocolate corresponds to an increase of €3.22. In other words, the addition of the second label generates an additional value of 40 centimes, i.e. 25% of the value of a label when it is evaluated separately. These results confirm those obtained previously, i.e. that combining two labels on a single product leads to an under-additivity of the WTP.

### 3.2. The case of brand/region labels

Table 5 shows that the average attitude towards regions and brands is relatively high and varies between 3 and 4 on a 5-point scale. Attitudes were measured using the same scale, thereby eliminating the bias linked to the measuring instruments. The respondents demonstrated a generally positive attitude towards the products, brands and regions.

**Table 5: Measurements of attitudes towards regions and brands**

	Cheese		Dish	
	Average	SD	Average	SD
Attitude towards coherent region	3.65	0.97	3.33	1.04
Attitude towards non-coherent region	3.35	0.96	3.10	0.96
Attitude towards national brand	3.39	0.99	3.47	1.14

Having successively evaluated the regions and the brands, we examined the evaluations of products with different combinations of brand and region of origin.

**Table 6: Evaluation of products carrying brand and origin**

Attitude	RM cheese	Average test	WS dish	Average test
Coherent origin	3.44	T=27,46; ddl=355; p<0.001	3.38	T=27,46,; ddl=355; p<0.001
Non-coherent origin	2.62		2.74	

On a 5-point scale, we generally noted that a product with a coherent origin is awarded a significantly better evaluation than a product with a non-coherent origin.

In the case of the dish, we noted the same results, i.e. a significant fall for a branded product when it is associated with a region considered to be non-coherent.

Given that we measured attitude towards brands and regions individually, we then compared the evaluation of branded products with an origin in relation to evaluations of different attributes.



**Table 7: Comparison of attitudes towards origin, the brand and a product carrying a brand and an origin for cheese**

	RM cheese Coherent origin	RM cheese Non-coherent origin
Region attitude	3.65	3.35
Brand attitude	3.39	3.39
Product with brand and origin attitude	3.44	2.62

We can compare the attitude towards a branded product of a certain origin with the attitudes towards the region and the brand. We note that when the region associated with the product is coherent, the evaluation of the branded product of a given origin lies between that of the brand and that of the region of origin. These results echo those obtained by Johansson and Nbenzahl (1986).

In the case of a non-coherent region, the evaluation of the branded product of a certain origin demonstrates a significant fall much greater than that of the brand and of the origin. The protective effect of the brand with regard to non-coherence would appear here to be insufficient, a result which contradicts those obtained by Jo, Nakamoto and Nelson (2003).

**Table 8: Comparison of attitudes towards origin, the brand and a product carrying a brand and an origin for the dish**

	WS dish Coherent origin	WS dish Non-coherent origin
Region attitude	3.33	3.10
Brand attitude	3.47	3.47
PBO attitude	3.38	2.74

In the case of the dish, the attitude towards the branded product of a certain origin is greater than the attitude towards the product alone, thereby confirming the value added procured by the brand and the origin.

Once again, we observe an evaluation of the branded product of a certain origin lying between the evaluation of the brand and that of the region of origin when the region is perceived as coherent and an evaluation well below the attitudes to the brand and the region when the latter is perceived as non-coherent.

The table 9 below measures the differences in evaluation in the case of association with a coherent region and a non-coherent region.

**Table 9 : Differences between the evaluations of coherent and non-coherent situations**

	With logical origin	With illogical origin	Deviation	t	ddl	sig
Cheese	3.44	2.62	-0.82	13.91	354	0.000
Dish	3.38	2.74	-0.64	13.20	360	0.000

In the case of a non-coherent region, the effect of product / region congruence becomes the main factor. This result echoes the literature on the categorisation and processing of information, which is incongruent with the individual's category pattern. Thus, in an incongruent situation where no other information is available to solve the situation, consumers will form their judgement according to the attribute, which seems to be the most prominent. In our case, there is congruence between the product and the region (Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989; Lee, 1995; Maoz and Tybout, 2002; Chakravarti and Janiszewski, 2003). Furthermore, the brands concerned by the experimentation are very well-known. If the effect of the brand falls significantly when the congruence between the product and the region is weak, the brand alone is insufficient to hide the non-fit with the region of origin. This result contradicts the works of Jo et al. (2003).

## **Conclusion**

The main conclusions to be drawn from the analyses provide us with a better understanding of the interaction effects between two quality labels on the same product. The results show that this effect falls in conditions of perceived non-coherence of the product / region pairing. Thus, the theory of the power of the brand which can bear an origin perceived as incoherent is called into question (Jo et al, 2003). When the region is non-coherent, the effect of product / region congruence is important irrespective of the brand and the product. This supports the literature on the fit effect between the product and the country of origin (Roth and Romeo, 1992) and more generally on the effect of the country of origin. Research on the effect of the country of origin generally shows that certain products receive a better evaluation when they come from a certain country without the congruence between the product and the country being explicitly measured. Our results suggest that it is not the direct effect of the country or the poor image of the country, rather the perceived coherence between the country and the product which comes into play. In the case of delocalisation of the production of goods, this means that if the country of origin appears non-coherent, this will result in a poor evaluation of the branded product with a specific origin (Häubl et Elrod, 1999), irrespective of the brand.

This work also provides information concerning the practice of organic and fair trade labelling. Our results show that the effects of interaction between the two labels are not always positive. Certain consumers buy organic products for health considerations and are not interested in fair trade. Others prefer chocolate which is only fair trade to chocolate from organic fair trade production because they do not trust the organic label. Consequently, dual labelling must not be a systematic process as most studies would suggest based on declarations. Organic and fair trade products both represent narrow markets and the intersection of the two markets can only be even more restricted. Dual labelling therefore requires greater caution and the market must not be overestimated.

In managerial terms, our research contributes to determining the role of the geographical origin of products in their valuation as well as the conditions of its use in a branding strategy. As we highlighted at the start this research, we observe a strong interest from companies in indicating the origin of their products. In this paper, we show that if the region of origin demonstrates high potential in product evaluation, it is not through its main effect but through the effects of interaction that it generates with the brand and the product. It

is therefore not enough to rely on a favourable attitude towards geographical origin; it is important to ensure good congruence with the product and the brand.

With regard to organic and fair trade labelling, companies and distributors must be aware that it is preferable to separate the products into their respective fields in order to match the different consumer expectations concerning these labels.

Despite the lessons to be drawn from this study, it is important to underline its limitations. First, even if the experimentation closely reflects real selection conditions, the conditions of the study remain experimental laboratory conditions in a different framework from that observed in a store. Furthermore, we deliberately disregarded other attributes such as the brand, price, etc. to avoid their interfering in the participants' decision-making process, although they nevertheless play an important role in reality both for organic and fair trade products.

The choice of products, the consumer samples and the labels tested all restrict the external validity of this research. Testing our hypotheses on other products and labels could help to strengthen the validity of our results.

Furthermore, in our research we only examined the immediate effects of non-congruence, although we are aware that the long-term effects on the brand image may be more significant.

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